EUROPEAN CITY FACILITY
Deliverable D 3.9
Helpdesk Strategy & FAQs (initial)

EUCF
European City Facility

Version number	Date	Organisation name	Comments
V0.1	17.12.2019	ENV	Sharing the first draft document with partners
V0.1	20.12.2019	ENC, FED, adelphi	Partners comment
V0.2	11.03.2020	ENV	Sharing modified draft (beneficiary helpdesk and central helpdesk) with partners and EASME
V0.3	30.03.2020	ENV	Incorporation of comments from EASME and partners
V0.4	09.04.2020	ENV	Sharing the new draft document (EUCF helpdesk strategy) with partners and EASME
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V0.1	13.03.202	ENV	Sharing the first draft structure FAQs with partners
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V0.5	22.05.2020	ENV	Incorporation of all comments (final version to be published on EUCF website)

Quality check	Status	Date	Comments
Quality Manager ENC	Ok	12/06/20	
Project Coordinator ENC	Ok	12/06/20	

The Purpose:

The purpose of EUCF helpdesk strategy is to describe the EUCF helpdesk approach and consisting of helpdesk overall activities, operation principals and work process that must be put in place to ensure providing EUCF applicants and beneficiaries with accurate, concise and timely support .

Definitions:

EUCF-HD- EUCF helpdesk

CE- Country Expert

CMT- Core Management Team

IC- Investment Concept

FAQs- Frequently Asked Questions

FMP- Facility Management Platform

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1. What is EUCF Helpdesk (EUCF-HD)

EUCF Helpdesk (EUCF-HD) is the main point of contact allows the EUCF applicants, beneficiaries and country experts (CEs) and anyone from public who is interested to know about EUCF to receive guidance and required information from EUCF helpdesk team.

EUCF helpdesk team is formed of two main groups:

- **EUCF team** consisting out of Core Management Team (CMT) which support and provide requirement information to CEs, beneficiaries, applicants and public.

- **Country Experts** support applicants in preparing full application and provide beneficiaries with technical & financial expertise for the preparation of the Investment Concept (IC) if requested.
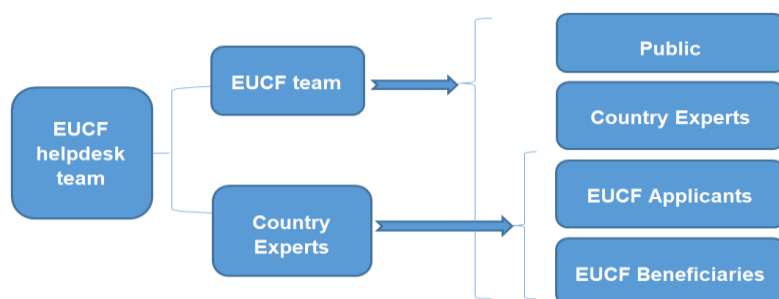
2. EUCF-HD Objectives

- Provide EUCF applicants and beneficiaries with services and access to the expertise of the EUCF team and CEs .

- Support CEs in their activities when needed.

- Ensure efficient and timely delivery of the information provided by the EUCF helpdesk team to the inquirers.

3. EUCF-HD Overall Activities

- Supporting the first-line administrative activities and providing support to the applicants, beneficiaries and CEs via helpdesk communication channels.

- Record the queries and issues that applicants and beneficiaries have been faced to improve the EUCF day-to-day operation activities.

- Feed the frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and develop it based on needs.

- Updating and adjusting the EUCF-HD procedures according to the applicants, beneficiaries and CEs' needs and issues they faced.

- Continuously assessing the needs, difficulties and opportunities of the EUCF applicants, beneficiaries and CEs for reporting to the EUCF team/board.

4. EUCF-HD Operation Principles

4.1 General rules for handling inquiries: Quality standards

- Providing timely and high-quality response according to defined priority of each query.

- Ensure a back-up when help desk team member is out of office.

- Be familiar with the EUCF requirements >> If not able to answer, the query to be forwarded to the right EUCF-HD team member and inform the inquirer about the transfer and possible delay.

- To verify the accuracy of answers, check relevant guidelines and supporting materials e.g. guideline for applicants, FAQs, etc. In case of not completely being sure of the answer, consult with other helpdesk team.

- Even when using the standard emails – try to personalize the info to the applicant's sign, when applicable.

4.2 General rules for handling inquiries: "Tracking" approach

- The EUCF-HD staff members are committed to track requests, status, progress – or any other relevant information related to each query.

- Systematically track and share of queries, statues and progress carry out by FMP through ticketing system. Automated mechanisms allow sending reminders or warning messages to the EUCF-HD staff members.

- The history of all questions and answer will be recorded and accessible to the helpdesk team. The CEs will have the access to all queries and answers logged in the helpdesk.

- Track information on frequently asked question to add a new entry in the EUCF FAQs.

4.3 EUCF-HD concept of support

- Provide efficient and concise support.

- Ensuring a feeling of personalized services, when applicable.

- Customized text combined with standard reply/explanations.

- Attachments of publications or existing screen-shot.

- Feedback for the EUCF team to learn more about the EUCF issues in different stages to tailor the following calls accordingly.

5. Who can contact EUCF-HD?

Anybody who needs information about EUCF grant can contact the EUCF helpdesk. Moreover, any applicants, beneficiaries and the CEs who need information or require supports from the EUCF helpdesk team can contact the EUCF-HD.

6. EUCF-HD Communication Tools

Facility management Platform (FMP-online database) is the main communication tool that enables and organizes communications between the EUCF helpdesk team and anyone who contact the EUCF helpdesk.
It also allows the EUCF team to engage with applicants, beneficiaries and the CEs receive their queries or requests, provide information and support in an easy, fast and efficient way.
It depends on the CEs decision whether they would like to support applicants and beneficiaries by other tools e.g. email or phone, specifically when it is matter of communication in local language.
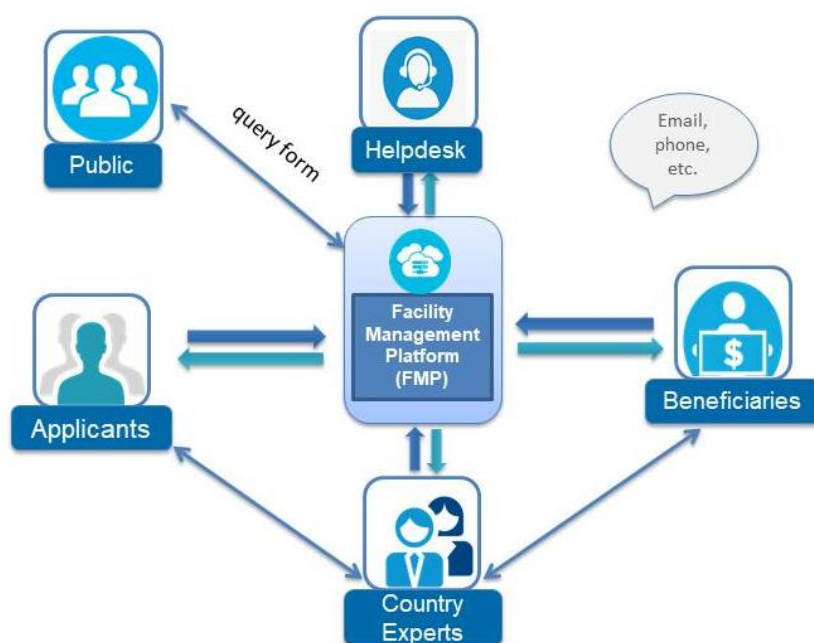

Figure1. EUCF Communication Tools

7. How to Access EUCF-HD

The EUCF helpdesk is accessible to public and anyone who need information on the EUCF website, through support menu, by selecting helpdesk web page. Any registered (CEs, applicants, beneficiaries) and non-registered (public) users to the FMP can approach helpdesk via the EUCF web site.

Registered users can directly contact helpdesk by logging in to the FMP.

8. EUCF-HD work process

The EUCF helpdesk work process is organized in two types:

8.1 For registered users to the FMP

All registered users contact the EUCF-HD team by logging in to the FMP Selecting the query's domain and submitting the query.
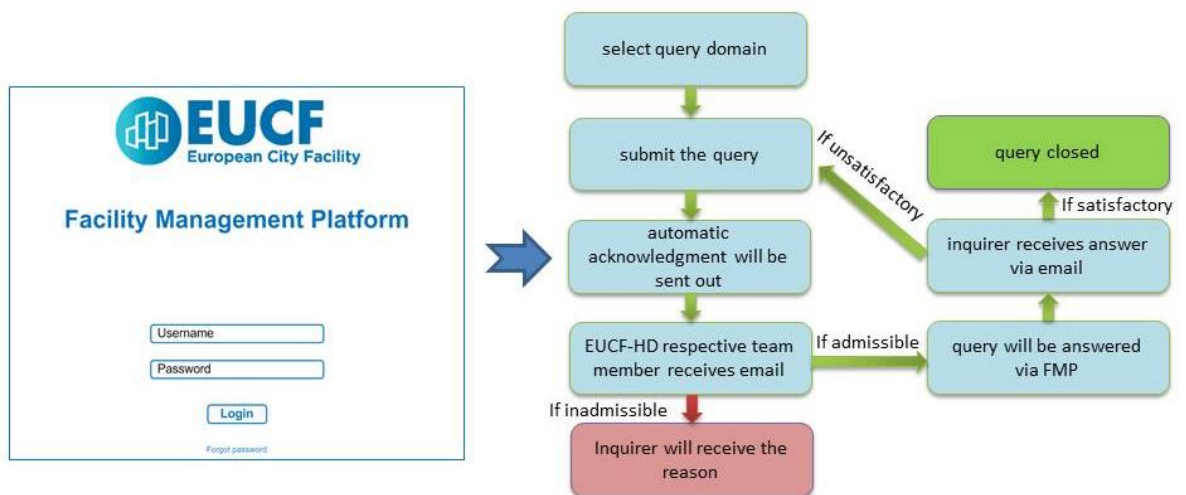
Auto reply to acknowledge receipt will send once the query submitted and inquirer will get informed about when they may expect to receive a response based on query priority defined at 9. EUCF-HD queries priority.

Respective helpdesk team member will receive the query notification email and reply through the FMP.

The inquirer will receive the answer via email in due course described at part.9. Query priority.

If the answer/solution is inadequate or more clarification is required, the inquirer could submit a new inquiry via available link in the email body.

Figure 2.EUCF-HD work process for registered users

8.2   For non-registered users to FMP

Non-registered users can contact the EUCF helpdesk team through the EUCF website, by visiting "Helpdesk" web page under "Support" window.

Inquirer will be redirected to the on-line query form which is linked to the FMP.

Inquirers are asked to provide required information e.g. email address and country, select the query's domain, fill in the query form and submit it.

Auto reply to acknowledge receipt will send once the query submitted and inquirer will get informed about when they may expect to receive a response based on query priority defined at 9. EUCF-HD queries priority.

Respective helpdesk team member will receive the query notification email and reply through the FMP.

If the query is admissible, the inquirer will receive the answer via email in due course described at part 10. Query priority.

If the answer/solution is inadequate or more clarification is required, the inquirer could submit a new query through query form via the EUCF websites. Since the new query is not connected to the previous queries and their answers, all potential applicants who are selected as 'eligible' are encouraged to register into the FMP.
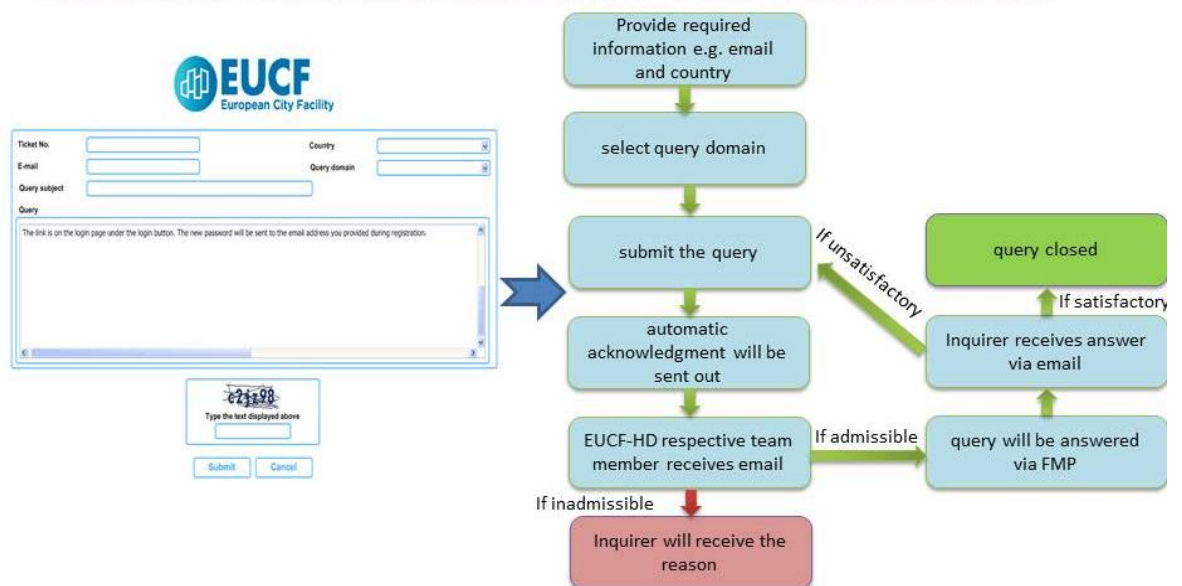
Figure 3.EUCF-HD work process for non-registered users

9. EUCF-HD Queries Priority

Prioritizing queries allows the EUCF-HD team to manage and resolve requested service/support. Ticketing system is a tool which can organize and manage the queries based on priorities, update the status of the queries, and keep the EUCF helpdesk team and inquirers updated on the progress.

EUCF-HD ticketing system through labelling and classify queries prioritize tickets based on urgency and impact on project process and outcomes. Table 1. Represents EUCF helpdesk set of priorities for queries which are submitted by public, potential applicants, the EUCF applicants.

Query domain	Priority	Ticket Resolution Time
IT	Highest	1 working days
EUCF calls	High	2 working days
Eligibility check	High	2 working days
Application process	High	2 working days
Supporting documents	High	2 working days
Evaluation result & Selection	Medium	3 working days
Others	Low	4 working days
Complaint	Lowest	5 working days

Table1. EUCF-HD queries priority for public, potential applicants and EUCF applicants

Table2. represents the EUCF helpdesk set of priorities for queries which are submitted by beneficiaries.

Query domain	Priority	Ticket Resolution Time
IT	Highest	1 working days
Grant Agreement	High	2 working days
Investment Concept	High	2 working days
Investment Concept Validation	High	2 working days
Investment Concept Implementation	Medium	3 working days
Grant Payment	Medium	3 working days
Others	Low	4 working days
Complaint	Lowest	5 working days

Table2. EUCF-HD queries priority for beneficiaries

All the defined domains in table 1 and table 2 will be displayed for the CEs.

10. EUCF-HD Ticketing System and Monitoring

The EUCF-HD ticketing system organizes the queries by providing visible statues and keeps it up-to-date to facilitate helpdesk process and monitoring. To ensure the queries keep answering and moving along the queue based on the defined priority, The EUCF-HD ticketing system shows the status of the queries and keep the EUCF-HD team member updated on the progress.

Ticketing system allows to track the number of queries and emails received and sent (overview of traffic) per month in the year, and average response time ≈ … (number of received message, from how many senders, addressed directly to each help desk team member).

The EUCF-HD ticketing system prioritizes queries based on urgency and impact on project process and outcomes (see part 9).

Proposed statues for each query:

- **New:** New query to which has not been paid attention yet

- **In-Progress:** ticket is already being handled by a EUCF helpdesk team

- **Delayed:** this status is assigned when the time for response has expired

- **Answered:** an answer has already been sent to the questioner

- **Rejected:** the query is considered irrelevant (spam)

11. EUCF-HD Support Tools

11.1 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs contain general questions and answers pertaining to the EUCF support, selection criteria, administrative and application procedures, technical issues, etc. the FAQs regularly will be updated by the EUCF help desk team.

11.2 Glossary

A glossary of frequently used terminology in the EUCF documents and guidelines (specifically the technical terms) will be available on the EUCF website. Glossary will be reviewed and updated permanently according to queries.

11.3 Guidelines for applicants

A step-by-step guideline to complete applications and investment concept will be available on the EUCF website for supporting applicants, cities/municipalities and its grouping and the CEs. Guidelines will be reviewed and updated permanently according to queries.

11.4 Guideline for CEs

Guidelines for the CEs is a supporting tools for the EUCF-HD to support the CEs in the provision of technical assistance to applicants and beneficiaries, guiding them through the whole process of the EUCF, from the pre-application stage to the monitoring phase.

11.5 Investment Concept template

To assist the CEs and support the EUCF beneficiaries in development of the Investment Concept, the Investment Concept template prepared by the EUCF team and the EUCF investment adviser team and is available to public on the EUCF website. The investment concept is a document which translates an investment project idea into financial language in order to mobilise financing for its realisation.

11.6 Case studies

To provide some examples of potential projects which can be funded by the EUCF grant, some case studies from similar financing schemes is available on the EUCF website.

12. Conflict of Interest

The EUCF helpdesk is operated by the EUCF team and the CEs. The EUCF team committed to treat all applicants and beneficiaries equally according to the grant agreement and the CEs signed a contract through which they signed Annex.6. "declaration of absence of conflict of interest" and commit that they will treat all applicants and beneficiaries equally and independently.

The Purpose:

The purpose of the FAQs is to provide information on potential frequent questions or concerns that can be raised by EUCF applicants, beneficiaries or Country Expert and public through an organized list of questions and answers. The FAQs frequently will be updated based on new queries.

Definitions:

CE– Country Expert

EUCF– European City Facility

EUCF-HD– EUCF helpdesk

EPC- Energy Performance Contracting

FAQs– Frequently Asked Questions

IC– Investment Concept

LAUs– local administrative units

NUTS– Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

SEAP– Sustainable Energy Action Plan

SECAP– Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan

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1. About the European City Facility (EUCF)

1.1 What is the EUCF?

The European City Facility (EUCF) is an initiative, set up under the [Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Union](), will provide tailor-made, rapid and simplified financial support (grants of EUR 60,000) and capacity building services to municipalities and local authorities across the EU Member states + the UK that will enable them to develop sound investment concepts and mobilise finance in the field of sustainable energy.

1.2 How does the EUCF support municipalities and local authorities?

The EUCF helps municipalities and local authorities to implement their energy and climate action plans by providing technical and financial support for the preparation of the Investment Concept (IC), which will enable municipalities and local authorities to mobilise financial resources. For detailed information on the EUCF journey, please refer to "[Guidelines for Applicants]()" which are available on the EUCF website.

1.3 Who can apply for the EUCF?

Municipalities and local authorities, as well as groupings of municipalities/local authorities, located in the European Union member states (EU-27) and the UK are able to apply to receive the EUCF support.

1.4 What kind of financial support do I receive from the EUCF?

Successful applicants receive financial support in the form of a **EUR 60,000 grant** for the development of the investment concept.

1.5 Which types of projects does the EUCF support?

The EUCF provides support for investment projects within the field of **sustainable energy**, including all investments on the energy demand side, which contribute to the improvement of energy performance and the achievement of energy savings. Among the investment sectors targeted by the EUCF are public, residential buildings and tertiary (non-municipal) buildings, efficiency improvements in equipment/facilities, development and use of building integrated renewables, district heating modernisation or fuel switch to renewables, smart grids, sustainable urban mobility (e.g. public transport, charging stations, etc.), and innovative energy infrastructure (e.g. citizen energy communities[1], innovative approaches to public lighting, wastewater treatment plants, etc.). Nevertheless, it is also possible to implement projects in further sectors, as long as they are in the field of sustainable energy.

1.6 Are there any Case studies or examples of potential investment projects?

To provide some ideas about the potential measures relevant to the municipal energy efficiency projects, there are some case studies available on the EUCF website in the "Knowledge Hub" section, under Support menu.

1.7 What is the policy framework for eligible projects to be supported by the EUCF?

In 2019 the EU completed a comprehensive update of its energy policy framework to facilitate the transition away from fossil fuels towards cleaner energy and to deliver on the EU's Paris Agreement commitments for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The key EU-wide 2030 climate and energy targets include a binding 40% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, at least 32% share for renewable energy and at least 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency. The EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050 – an economy with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

The main policies supporting agreed EU policy framework is **The Green Deal** – a roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities. The roadmap includes mainly actions to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy and restore biodiversity and cut pollution.

It is anticipated that many potential investment projects developed under the EUCF will be financed by the European Investment Bank that is why **the EIB energy lending policy** is also mentioned here. The EUCF has a clear position not to support investments in energy projects reliant on unabated fossil fuels, such as the production of oil and natural gas, traditional gas infrastructure, power generation technologies resulting in GHG emissions above 250 gCO_2 per kWh of electricity generated, and large-scale heat production infrastructure based on unabated oil, natural gas, coal or peat.

The main supported projects are in the field of **energy efficiency** (e.g. in buildings and public lighting), **energy supply** (e.g. generation of power and heat from renewable energy sources), **innovation and new types of energy infrastructure** (e.g. electrification of transport) and **enabling infrastructure** (e.g. smart meters, upgrade of district heating and cooling infrastructure).

1.8 If a municipality has generally the financial means for their projects, is it possible to apply in order to reduce the cost for the development of the project and foster exchange and expertise?

Yes, the applicant might need technical expertise e.g. if internal capacities are missing, for the development of the Investment Concept, that can be paid through the EUCF.

1.9 What additional technical and capacity building support does the EUCF provide?

The EUCF provides municipalities and local authorities with different types of additional technical support activities along their journey within the EUCF:

- **National webinars, Info sessions and regional capacity building events** in cooperation with National Networks and Country Experts are planned before the opening of each call for applications.

- **Support from Country Experts in national language** to assist beneficiaries of the EUCF with technical and financial expertise in the development of the investment concept. Applicants receive technical guidance from CEs in the preparation and submission of application, if required.

- **Support from the EUCF Helpdesk:** The EUCF Helpdesk is available on the EUCF website for the general public, potential applicants and other interested parties to raise questions and obtain information from the EUCF team. Along the entire EUCF journey, the EUCF Helpdesk plays a fundamental role in providing technical support to applicants and beneficiaries of the EUCF.

- **Knowledge products and materials:** Various knowledge tools and documents are provided on the EUCF website to facilitate the application and development process of the investment concept, such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), Glossary, Investment Concept template, Case Studies, etc.

A series of **capacity- building workshops,** to which successful beneficiaries (former EUCF beneficiaries, as well as beneficiaries of other facilities, ELENA, PDA, etc.) will be invited to run peer-to-peer training workshops. Successful investment concept municipalities can train unsuccessful applicants on how to become a beneficiary but also on how to develop an investment concept.

In order to maximise the financial leverage of individual projects and to aggregate opportunities by region and technology, **Matchmaking events** are planned to engage with the investor network at the local/ regional level but also across Europe and EU institutions **Communities of Practice** will bring together supported Investment Concepts exploring similar technologies, covering similar technologies or sectors from different parts of Europe.

Access to **EU pool of experts, hands- on tools and good practice examples** will foster project standardisation and aggregation.

For detailed information on "what technical and capacity building support does the EUCF provide", please refer to "Guidelines for Applicants" which is available on the EUCF website.

2. Application Process

2.1 How can I apply for the EUCF?

You can **only** apply via web application, which is available on the Facility website. The overall application process consists of two main steps: the eligibility check and the full application.

1) Eligibility check

The eligibility check is a simple, automated questionnaire, which can be answered by the applicant directly online. It verifies whether an applicant is eligible to apply for financial support from the EUCF. To be eligible, applicants must be able to answer with YES to all five requirements. Applicants receive the result of the eligibility check immediately after answering all questions. At this stage, supporting documents are not required.

2) Full application

After successfully passing the eligibility check, the applicant can complete the full application form, prepare the supporting documents and submit them via the EUCF website user zone. Once the call for proposals is closed, the applications are evaluated by a dedicated team. The best scored applications are selected and will conclude the grant agreements to receive the EUCF support. Unsuccessful applications can seek support from the EUCF Helpdesk and participate again in the next call for applications.

2.2 How is the geographical coverage of EUCF calls planned?

Over the course of three years, four calls for applications with cut off dates will take place in parallel for three geographic regions (incl. UK) of the European Union, as shown in the table below:

Regional call	Countries
Central and Eastern Europe	Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia.
Nordic countries & Western Europe	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom.
Southern Europe	Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain.

2.3 What is the tentative timeline for the EUCF calls for applications?

Overall, each call for applications will be open for two months, except for the first call where the application period has been extended due to Covid-19. The following periods apply:

Call for Proposals	Application period
1st call	25 May – 2 October 2020
2nd call	March – April 2021
3rd call	October – November 2021
4th call	May – June 2022

The exact dates of the calls 2-4 and any alterations regarding the opening and closing of application periods will be published on the EUCF website under the section [Open and previous calls].

2.4 How can I find support for the application process?

Available on the EUCF website, the guideline for applicants provides a comprehensive source of information about the entire EUCF process. Moreover, a Glossary of relevant terms is provided to facilitate the applicant's understanding of the EUCF documents. In case of questions that cannot be found in these documents, you can seek further support from the EUCF Helpdesk which provides efficient and timely responses to the queries raised. In addition, the Country Expert in each country will be ready to help the applicants, when required and national networks organize webinar/info sessions at national level.

3. Eligibility Check

3.1 Where can I find the eligibility check?

The eligibility check is available on the EUCF website.

3.2 What are the eligibility criteria?

To be eligible for the EUCF support, you have to meet the following requirements:

- Being a municipality/local authority or grouping of municipalities/local authorities
- Municipalities/local authority or grouping of municipalities/local authorities must be located in a EU-27 member state and the United Kingdom

- Having politically approved Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP), Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan(SECAP) or plan of similar ambition

- Being able to demonstrate political commitment to the project

- Being able to demonstrate commitment to the monitoring period of two years

In order to move to the next stage of the application process, applicants must be able to answer YES to all of the above mentioned requirements. The eligibility check can be **only** done online. After completing the check, applicants are immediately informed about their results and next steps.

3.3   What does a plan of similar ambition have to contain in order to be equivalent to a SEAP or SECAP?

Municipalities/local authorities without a Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) or Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP), developed in the Covenant of Mayors framework are able to submit a politically approved energy/climate plan of similar ambition. A plan of similar ambition is considered equivalent to a SEAP/SECAP if it includes energy and climate targets at least for the year 2020.

As part of the full application, SEAPs, SECAPs or plans of similar ambition need to be submitted together with the template for Annex A – SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition – Summary, to provide an overview of the main energy and climate targets established by the plan.

3.4   Can SEAP or SECAP be submitted in local languages?

Yes, SEAP, SECAP or a plan of similar ambition can be submitted in the national language and there is no need for translating it into English.

3.5   Is SECAP or SEAP necessary for the EUCF application? Or could it be another low carbon strategy, for example based on local legislation?

Any other plan with similar ambitions in terms of sustainable energy and greenhouse gas emission reductions are eligible. Such plans should include energy and climate targets at least for the year 2020 Please see also the Covenant of Mayors website for SECAP ambitions. As part of the full application, any plans of similar ambition need to be submitted together with the template for Annex A– SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition – Summary, to provide an overview of the main energy and climate targets established by the plan.

3.6   Are regional energy plans (based on national law) eligible, as SECAPs are on city level?

Yes, regional energy plans are eligible provided they can be considered of 'similar ambition' and include energy and climate targets at least for the year 2020. The applicant will provide the energy/climate targets established by the plan, to help the evaluation

committee to compare its action plan with SEAP/SECAP structure. As part of the full application, any plans of similar ambition need to be submitted together with the template for Annex A– SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition – Summary, to provide an overview of the main energy and climate targets established by the plan.

3.7 Which sectors are eligible?

Any sector in the field of sustainable energy e.g. energy efficiency and renewable energy are considered as eligible sectors for the EUCF grant.

3.8 Are regional/inter-municipal communities or associations of local authorities eligible?

Any regional/inter-municipal communities or association of local authorities which have a Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics(NUTS)_ III code or local administrative units (LAUs), are eligible for the EUCF grant.

3.9 Would investment concept preparation for funding from national programme, including the EU structural funds be eligible?

Yes, this is eligible. Municipalities and local authorities can seek funding from local, national and international sources.

3.10 Should the IC focus only on public projects or can private projects be included as well?

Public and private projects are both eligible.

3.11 Are Public-private partnership (PPP) projects eligible, in which, for example, a contractor builds a heat network to supply municipality buildings?

The PPP can be an option for the implementation of the Investment Concept.

3.12 Could small municipalities located in the EU and UK islands apply for the EUCF?

Any municipalities or local authorities or groupings located in EU or UK islands which have got LAU code can apply for the EUCF.

3.13 As energy agencies and experts, are we allowed applying on behalf of our municipalities?

No, Energy agencies cannot apply. The application is open exclusively to municipalities, local authorities or groupings of municipalities/local authorities. Energy Agencies may support the beneficiary, through the EUCF grant, for the provision of technical expertise for the development of Investment Concepts.

3.14 How will I be informed about the result of the eligibility check?

You will see the result of the eligibility check on the screen as soon as you answer all questions. If you pass the test, you will be offered the registration to the EUCF website user zone.

3.15 Is there any population limit for municipalities/local authorities to receive the EUCF grant?

No, there is no minimum or maximum population limit for municipalities/local authorities to apply for the EUCF.

3.16 Is there a minimum leverage factor my project has to achieve?

No minimum leverage factor is required for the EUCF grant, but however; the IC should be at least matching the EU's ambitious energy and climate objectives. .

3.17 What is meant by political commitment? How can I demonstrate political commitment?

In order to demonstrate the political commitment for the development of the Investment Concept, the EUCF applicant must provide a letter of support, signed by the Mayor or other relevant political representative of the Municipality/local authority. The letter of support needs to be submitted together with the full application. The applicants are encouraged to use a corresponding *[template for Annex B]*, where only general data has to be added and then it is ready to be signed by the political representative.

4. Application Form & Required Documents

4.1 Where can I find the EUCF application form?

The online application form is accessible for applicants who have successfully completed the eligibility check and registered themselves into the EUCF website user zone.

4.2 How should I submit the EUCF application form?

Submission of applications is only admitted online through the application portal. You create, complete and submit your application on-line in the EUCF website user zone.

4.3 Which documents must be provided for the EUCF full application?

Annex A: Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP), Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) or plan of similar ambition and corresponding summary of the plan.

Annex B: Letter of support to the project by the mayor or other relevant political representative.

Annex C: Self-declaration form by a representative of the municipality/local authority or grouping.

Annex D: Calculation log - Expected energy savings.

Annex E: Calculation log - Expected size of investment.

All the Annexes are provided and accessible on the EUCF website.

4.4 How can I deliver the required documents for the EUCF application?

All the required documents are uploaded to the application on-line in the EUCF website user zone. The required documents must be submitted in pdf and/or excel format. Templates are provided for the submission of the supporting documents.

4.5 Which language do I have to use to fill out the application form? Is it possible to submit supporting documents in the national language?

The application form shall be completed in English. If possible, the supporting documents to the application should be submitted in English. To facilitate this, the EUCF provides templates for the required documents. However, in case these documents are only available in national language (especially SEAP. SECAP or plan of similar ambition) they can be submitted in national languages.

4.6 What are the NUTS and LAU codes and where can I find them?

The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) is a territorial classification that subdivides the territory of the European Union into three different hierarchical levels (NUTS 1, NUTS 2 and NUTS 3) for statistical and planning purposes. The NUTS 3 classification corresponds to *small regions for specific diagnoses* at regional level.

Concerning the local level, a system of Local Administrative Units (LAUs) is maintained in compatibility with the NUTS system. LAUs are subdivisions of the NUTS 3 regions, covering the whole economic territory of each EU Member State.

The respective NUTS 3 and LAU codes can be found on the yearly updated list, available on the Eurostat website. However, in the application form, the corresponding codes are assigned automatically based on the postal codes provided.

4.7 Can municipalities / local authorities apply for grant several times (e.g. for different investment concepts related to different sectors)?

Municipalities and local authorities can apply for the EUCF grant several times, but the grant can be awarded to one municipality only once. Municipalities and local authorities can submit one application per each call, either alone or in a group.

5. Application by Grouping of Municipalities/Local Authorities

5.1 What shall I take into account when applying as a group?

Groupings of municipalities/local authorities are highly encouraged to apply for the EUCF. When applying as grouping, the following points have to be considered:

- Both formal (e.g. formalised by an assembly act) and informal groupings are invited to apply.

- One responsible partner, i.e. one lead applicant has to be defined.

- In the application form, the relations and decision-making processes within the grouping for the development of the investment concept have to be outlined.

- Either the lead applicant or the grouping needs to have a SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition and provide the other supporting documents.

- As the EUCF aims to support especially small and medium-sized municipalities / local authorities and if feasible, encourages them to team up, groupings are appreciated in the evaluation process.

- In case the application is successful, the grant amount of EUR 60,000 is awarded to the grouping as a whole. Thus, the lump sum is awarded per application, not per municipality/local authority.

- Lead applicant is responsible to sign the Grant Agreement and to disburse the amount among the partners.

5.2 How do groupings prove potential commitment and submit their climate and energy plans?

The lead applicant must have a politically approved SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition. Joint action plans prepared collectively by a grouping of municipalities/local authorities are also accepted.

The proof of political commitment to the development of the investment concept through a letter of support by the mayor or other relevant political representative must be submitted only by the lead applicant of the grouping.

5.3 How is the EUCF grant agreement signed by groupings?

Groupings are not obliged to form a joint legal body but they have to define a *lead applicant*. This lead applicant will sign the Grant agreement with the EUCF and receive the lump sum which can be then used according to the consortium's internal agreement / governance they put in place.

5.4 Is the EUCF grant divided among the members of the groupings?

The grant amount of EUR 60,000 is awarded to the grouping as a whole. Thus, the lump sum is awarded per application, not per municipality/local authority.

5.5 In case of grouping, can a municipality that has been a part of an application as grouping apply again but alone?

If the grouping application has been successful, the municipality cannot apply again alone. If the application has been unsuccessful, the municipality can apply again – either in the grouping or alone.

6. Evaluation and Selection of Beneficiaries

6.1 What is the procedure for evaluating the applications?

The evaluation of the EUCF applications is conducted after the close of each call for applications by a dedicated evaluation team, composed of evaluators from Adelphi and ENVIROS (neither the Energy city and Climate Alliance, nor FEDARENE are involved in the evaluation process). Each application is evaluated individually by at least two different evaluators. The evaluators verify if Annex A (SEAP, SECAP or plan of similar ambition and corresponding summary of the plan), Annex B (Proof of political commitment), Annex C (Self-declaration form), Annex D (Estimation of energy savings) and Annex E (Estimation of investment size) have been submitted and contain the required content. In case of incomplete documents, the application is rejected and the applicant receives an email notification from the EUCF website user zone. Applications are then evaluated based on five evaluation criteria. At the end of the evaluation process, each applicant is informed about the final result with corresponding justification through a feedback report. The best scored applications are selected to receive EUCF support. Rejected applications can seek support from the EUCF Helpdesk and are able to participate again in the next call for applications.

6.2 What are the criteria for evaluating the applications

The EUCF applications are evaluated based on the five evaluation criteria: Investment size, energy saving generated by the planned investment project, governance structure, stakeholder's engagement and alignment with the EUCF objectives. For detailed information on "Evaluation criteria", please refer to the "Guidelines for Applicants" which are available on the EUCF website.

6.3 How long does it take to receive the evaluation results?

The evaluation process takes two months from the end of the respective call. After this period, applicants will be informed about the final result.

6.4   How will I be informed about the final results?

After the finalization of the evaluation process, you will be informed about the results with corresponding justification through a feedback report. The report will be available in the EUCF website user zone. It will also be sent via email to the applicant.

6.5   Does the EUCF require a minimum or maximum investment size included in the IC?

There is no required minimum or maximum size of the project; however in the evaluation process, the level of ambition of the expected size of investment of the planned investment project is set into relation to the other submitted applications in the region (regional call) as well as to the local context the bigger investment receives better scoring.

6.6   At the evaluation phase is there a preference toward smaller local authorities than larger ones (e.g. a 20,000 population against a 2 million city)?

Overall vision is to support smaller and medium sized municipalities and local authorities which often have less capacities and high potential. During the evaluation phase, in the section regarding energy savings ambitions, the local context is taken into account. So, for example if the energy savings are very ambitious for a small local authority, this will be taken into account for the final score.

6.7   What are the next steps in case my application is selected?

As a next step, successful applicants conclude a Grant Agreement to receive the EUCF support. The time period foreseen for the preparation and signature of the Grant Agreement is two months.

6.8   Will the proposal with a high replication potential be a positive element in the evaluation?

Yes, alignment of proposal with EUCF objective is taken into account. EUCF objective is to build a substantial pipeline of sustainable energy investment projects across cities in Europe. If the proposal demonstrates the potential of developing a sound (and new) investment concept including a consideration of the investment project's potential for replication and up-scaling, at evaluation stage it scores according to guidelines for applicants (3.1.2 criteria for evaluation the applicants).

6.9   Can I appeal to reconsider the decision made by the evaluation team?

Yes, you can ask the EUCF team to reconsider the decision made by the Evaluation team by submitting a "Complaint" query via the EUCF helpdesk query domain.

6.10 What happens in case my application is unsuccessful?

Unsuccessful applications will receive a feedback report of the evaluation and can seek support from the EUCF helpdesk team on how the application could be improved. You are able to participate again in the next call for applications.

7. Grant Agreement

7.1 What is the timeline for the signature of the EUCF grant agreement?

The timeline for the preparation and signature of the EUCF Grant Agreement is two months. It starts at the end of the evaluation process, when successful applicants are informed about their selection for the EUCF support, and ends with the transfer of the first tranche of payment (70% of EUR 60,000 grant amount) to the beneficiary.

7.2 How is the EUCF grant paid?

The grant amount will be disbursed as follows:

- Pre-financing of 70% of the total amount at the Grant Agreement signature;

- Final payment of 30% of the total amount after positive validation of the investment concept.

7.3 In case a 'grouping of cities' apply for the EUCF grant, should all cities sign the grant agreement?

Only the lead applicant is responsible to sign the Grant Agreement and to disburse the amount among the partners.

8. Development of Investment Concept

8.1 What is an Investment Concept (IC)?

An Investment Concept is a document which **translates an investment project idea into financial language** in order to mobilise financing for its realisation.

The purpose of an investment concept is to provide investors and financial institutions with the information necessary to **assess an investment project in a simple and fast manner**. It converts climate and energy plans or part of its measures into sound investment packages and thus, facilitates the access to funding for municipalities/local authorities.

So far, many municipalities/local authorities have developed ambitious climate and energy action plans but had difficulties to access appropriate funding. In turn, financial institutions are more and more interested in financing sustainable energy projects but

have problems in finding investment projects that fulfil their requirements. This document shall help in bridging this gap.

8.2   What is the structure of an investment concept?

In order to facilitate the development of the investment concept for the EUCF beneficiaries, an *[investment concept template]* has been developed in close consultation with EUCF key stakeholders, i.e. financial institutions, municipalities and local authorities as well as climate and energy experts. The investment concept template follows the following structure:

- A one-page summary ("teaser"/"elevator pitch") with key information on the investment project (such as estimated costs and revenues, financial indicators and expected impacts. This summary shall be developed in English and potentially be made public in the EUCF communication channels.

- The main body consists of five sections: i) Description of planned investment project, ii) Promoter(s) and (local) stakeholders, iii) Legal analysis, iv) Economic and financial analysis and v) Investment Roadmap. The main body can be developed in national language or in English, according to the preference of the beneficiary.

- Supporting documents can be attached as Annexes to complement and provide details on the main part.

8.3   Which information has to be provided in an investment concept?

A template for the development of the investment concept is available on the EUCF website. The main part of the IC is based on a 5-point structure:

- A detailed description of the planned investment project

- Project promoter(s) and (local) stakeholders

- Legal analysis

- Economic and financial analysis

- Investment roadmap

For detailed information on "Investment Concept", please refer to "Guidelines for Applicants" which are available on the EUCF website.

8.4   Who can develop an investment concept?

The investment concepts are developed by the beneficiary municipalities/local authorities or groupings of municipalities/local authorities, either completely in-house if enough internal capacities are available or they can engage external experts for support. Country Experts assist beneficiaries in their respective countries in this process, but cannot be sub-contracted to develop investment concepts.

8.5 What support do beneficiaries receive from the EUCF for development of the IC?

The EUCF provides different means of support for beneficiaries throughout the development of the investment concept:

- **Financial support** is provided in the form of a EUR 60,000 lump sum for activities necessary for the development of the investment concept, such as feasibility studies, engineering analyses, legal analyses, social studies, market studies, financial analyses, etc.

- **Technical support** is provided through the respective country experts, which are assigned for each EU member state & the UK to offer beneficiaries locally-rooted technical and financial expertise. The EUCF team can also be contacted for any sort of queries regarding the investment concept through the EUCF Helpdesk.

- **Capacity building** opportunities are provided through regional events organised by the EUCF on the topic.

- **Standard tools and documents**, such as the investment concept template, are provided to facilitate the development of the Investment Concept.

8.6 What is the timetable for the development of the investment concept?

EUCF beneficiaries shall develop the investment concept within twelve months from Grant Agreement signature.

8.7 Can the IC be submitted in the national language?

Yes, the Investment Concept can be submitted in the national language. The only requirement is to make a short summary in English which will be used for the validation of the Investment Concept.

8.8 Does the development of investment concepts include the development of technical documentation as well?

No, detailed technical design is not required, but main technical parameters and detailed calculation of energy savings and CO_2 emission reduction resulting from measures drafted in the IC are required.

8.9 Is it possible to download the IC template to work on it and upload it afterward?

The IC template (in national languages) is available on the EUCF website (www.eucityfacility.eu), so it can be easily downloaded any time. When the beneficiary has the final version, it has to be uploaded in pdf format.

9. Validation and Implementation of Investment Concept

9.1 How is the investment concept validated?

After finalisation of the Investment Concepts, they are validated by a dedicated evaluation team based on an English Summary drafted by the beneficiaries. The English Summary of the Investment Concept is kept concise, comprising key figures that allow a good overview and understanding of the proposed investment.

For detailed information on "IC validation", please refer to "Guidelines for Applicants" which is available on the EUCF website.

9.2 Who validates the investment concept?

The validation of the final investment concept is conducted by a dedicated EUCF evaluation team, composed of evaluators from adelphi and ENVIROS.

9.3 How can a beneficiary receive support after the validation of the Investment Concept?

Following the support activities during the development of the investment concept, the second set of support accompanies the implementation of the investment concepts and aims at bringing in touch EUCF beneficiaries with the investor community. The EUCF accompanies the implementation process by organising matchmaking events, Communities of Practice and other capacity building events where EUCF beneficiaries are highly encouraged to participate. Moreover, the EUCF Helpdesk is available for beneficiaries to address the EUCF team in case of questions regarding the implementation of the investment concept, the procedures for monitoring and reporting and the potential aggregation/joint procurement of projects

9.4 Are the beneficiaries obliged to prove how they have used the lump sums?

The beneficiaries should keep any invoice and financial report on records for monitoring purpose.

9.5 What happens if the Investment Concept cannot be completed in the foreseen time period?

In case the beneficiary is not able to complete the investment concept in the foreseen time period of up to twelve months, she/he will have to submit a "non-implementation" report, describing the challenges that occurred and learning from the process. The final payment, i.e. 30% of the total grant amount will not be disbursed. Overall, the EUCF Team and the respective Country Expert assist municipalities/local authorities throughout the development process of Investment Concepts and strive to minimise such situations

through the technical support provided. Nevertheless, if they occur, it is the objective to jointly learn from the experiences.

9.6 Do beneficiaries of the EUCF have to implement the investment concept?

EUCF beneficiaries are highly encouraged to seek funding from investors and financial institutions and implement their investment concepts. Nevertheless, in case beneficiaries are not able to implement the investment concept, there are no consequences. Beneficiaries are able to share their experiences and hurdles by participating in matchmaking events, Communities of practice, and other capacity building events that are organised by the EUCF, and can benefit from the EUCF Helpdesk to address the EUCF team in case of questions regarding the implementation of the investment concept, the procedures for monitoring and reporting and the potential aggregation/joint procurement of projects.

9.7 What are the monitoring procedures?

EUCF beneficiaries must commit to a monitoring period of two years, in which the implementation of the investment concept is supervised and documented. During this period, beneficiaries are required to notify the EUCF on the implementation process by submitting two simple monitoring forms on key figures, which will be used to assess the impacts of the EUCF.

9.8 How can the measures developed in the investment concept be financed?

During the implementation of the investment concept phase, there is no preference among financing sources. The municipality can access any type of funding through banks, private investors, ESIF, national funds, local funds, crowd funding,, EPCs, etc. To learn more about financing opportunities for sustainable energy and climate action plans, please see Covenant of Mayors funding guideline.